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Michael and *Gertrud:* Art and the Artist in the Films of Carl Theodor Dreyer

David Heinemann

In his two films about artists, *Michael* (1924) and *Gertrud* (1964), important but problematic works that frame his best known and most highly regarded films – *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1927), *Vampyr* (1932), *Day of Wrath* (1943), *Ordet* (1954) – Carl Theodor Dreyer explores the theme of romantic love in the artistic milieu. Art and artistic creation and performance lie at the heart of these films, and Dreyer's *mise-en-scène* contains numerous paintings and *objets d'art*. These objects play a decorative role, but also a narrative one: they presage and mirror events; they express or catalyse characters and relationships. While characters relate actively to these works of art, interpreting and communicating through them, the stylistic strategies employed in the films frequently aestheticise the characters, conspicuously transforming them into works of art in their own right. Through composition, staging and performance – Dreyer's tableau style, close-ups of disembodied faces, statue-like poses – characters are compared, and compare themselves, to figures in art. At once automaton and agent, the characters inhabit an uncertain realm between object and subject, predetermination and free will. From the conflict between these opposing orientations, often manifested through the forced marriage of narrative development and pictorial stasis, Dreyer comments upon the role of art in life and the dislocations of the human soul as it confronts the intolerable in the world.

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze explains that the experience of the 'intolerable' occurs when we realise that we have lost our connection to the world and are trapped in 'the permanent state of a daily banality' (1989: 164). This state might be caused by a prescriptive economic and ideological framework that does not appear to admit of change. Rodowick describes Deleuze's notion of our contemporary daily situation as 'characterized by repetition as return of the same, primarily in the standardized production of commodities

and the proliferation of information ... mechanical, stereotyped, and habitual repetition' (1997: 203). Deleuze finds revolutionary potential in a particular kind of cinema which provides ways to help us to think afresh, to imagine new realities. Certain modernist films feature protagonists who are in some sense 'seers', aware of a spiritual malaise and able dimly to envisage the possibility of change in the world, even if this change cannot yet be thought, much less articulated. The form of these films challenges the viewer with a new image of the world, a 'time-image' that comprises 'irrational' connections between shots, disjunctive or vacuous spaces, false continuity, and the sense of a direct image of time: time in its duration; time, 'the unalterable form filled by change' (Deleuze 1989: 17). Deleuze cites some of Dreyer's protagonists as examples of the 'seer' character, or 'mummy' as he also calls them, who 'sees better and further than he can react, that is, think', and tries to find a way out of the spiritual entrapment:

> To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: "something possible, otherwise I will suffocate"
>
> (1989: 164)

This is the situation in which the protagonists of *Michael* and *Gertrud* find themselves. Their attempts to find a way out, as well as the often radical formal qualities of these films, provide a sustained exploration of the role of art in life.

Both *Michael* and *Gertrud* are tragedies, although not in the classical sense. Indeed, for these films Dreyer chose to adapt works by authors with a 'modern' conception of tragedy, as he makes clear in an interview in which he discusses the play *Gertrud*:

> I had chosen the work of Hjalmar Söderberg because his conception of tragedy is more modern, he was overshadowed far too long by the other giants, Ibsen and Strindberg. Why did I say he was 'more modern'? Well, instead of suicide and other grand gestures in the tradition of pathetic tragedy, Söderberg preferred the bitter tragedy of having to go on living even though ideals and happiness have been destroyed.
>
> (quoted in Nash 1977: 67)

Michael too features a protagonist attempting to come to terms with the destruction of his happiness and his ideals. Although some critics consider the film to be an anomaly in Dreyer's oeuvre, the story is broadly similar to that of *Gertrud*.[1] Both films have a comparable three-part narrative structure. The story begins with the protagonist in love with someone whom they believe to be their ideal lover. This lover then betrays their trust and disparages their love, resulting in the protagonist's disillusionment and misery. In the final act the protagonist appears to come to terms with the loss, transfiguring it into an apotheosis of character. These are tragedies about the 'banality' of the everyday (in Deleuze's sense), featuring tragic heroes who suffer not from a fatal flaw but from the incommensurability of life and love with their idealised notions of them. Dramatically the films are made difficult by the absence of catharsis; although the characters visibly suffer, Dreyer mobilises narrative and stylistic strategies which inhibit viewer identification. Key to these is the role played by art within the diegesis.

The films suggest that art, artistic creation or performance can act as conduits for feelings of spiritual and sexual love. In *Michael* the celebrated middle-aged painter, Claude Zoret, known as the Master, first meets the aspiring artist, Michael, when Michael presents to him a sheaf of sketches. Zoret claims the work is worthless ('Come back once you have

learned how to really see!'), but engages Michael as a model. Michael becomes his muse and, it is implied, his lover. He also becomes something of an adopted son to the childless, unmarried Zoret. Zoret paints his most highly regarded and successful works with Michael as his model, most notably *The Victor*. In the flashback to their first meeting, it appears that Zoret notices Michael's beauty only after his rejection of the young man. He calls him back: 'I feel like painting you. Do you want to pose for me?' What prompts Zoret to act as he does? Perhaps when he sees Michael's potential as a model – that is, the basis for a work of art – he begins to fall in love with him. Or is it rather the reverse: smitten by his boyish charm, Zoret envisages making him into a work of art? The film makes clear that in the world of *Michael* artistic practice and the appreciation of art are a training for seeing, for achieving clarity of vision, aligned with understanding, and dependent upon loving. In his relationship with Michael, the Master proves that he knows 'how to really see'.

Art can stimulate feelings of love and also provide a medium for characters to communicate this love. The Countess Zamikow, with whom Michael will betray the affections of Zoret, first properly notices Michael only after she has seen Zoret's paintings in which he features as a naked mythical hero. The onset of Zamikow's and Michael's mutual infatuation is marked by alternating close-up single shots of the characters gazing radiantly at each other as they stand before Zoret's masterwork, *The Victor*. Rather than seeing Michael in the painting, Zamikow sees the painting in Michael: 'So that is you!' she says to him, smitten by his beauty which the painting has just revealed to her. Demonstrating the power of art to influence our perception of (pro-filmic) reality, Dreyer deploys in this sequence reflexive stylistic techniques as if to mirror for the film's viewers the experience of the characters they observe. In Michael's glamorous close-up, a shot sustained beyond its narrative function, the actor appears to look straight into the camera, directly engaging the viewer in an appreciation of this portrait of youthful beauty but also breaking the fourth wall.

Intercutting these close-ups with extreme long shots highlights their artifice (this is not continuity editing), as does Zamikow's white feather headdress which, in creating an exaggerated halo effect in her close-ups, bares the device of the glamour shot itself. Even Michael's boyish prank, turning the portable spotlight used to illuminate Zoret's paintings on Zamikow herself, as if *she* were a work of art, a sculpture perhaps, encourages a reflexive reading of this scene. We are thus witness to multiple acts of creation of ideal beauty within and through art, both in the diegesis and extradiegetically.

Later, Michael's love for the Countess Zamikow allows him to see her truly and to finish the painting on behalf of the Master, who is incapable of completing her eyes. Stylistically the moment is one of the most striking in the film. The single close-ups of the two characters are composed on axis with the actors looking directly into the camera, Zamikow's face masked from just below her eyes (fig. 1), and a dolly toward Michael's face (one of the few dolly shots in the film) marking the intensity and importance of the moment, but also the artifice of its representation. Indeed the incipient lovers are together engaged in artifice: the completion of a work of art. In the world of the film, the success of Michael's intervention (Zoret exclaims, 'Yes! Now it's her eyes!') testifies to the strength of their psychic and emotional connection.

In *Gertrud* too love is channelled, if not engendered, by art. Gertrud, herself a famous poet and former opera singer now married to a lawyer, falls in love with the pianist and composer Erland Jansson when she sees him perform at a concert of his work. She later declares her feelings to him by singing a love sonnet accompanied by him on the piano. This moment is represented primarily by a long, arcing dolly shot in which the camera moves to a closer view of the two characters performing, then returns on the same trajectory to its original position. In its conception this recalls the dolly shot of Michael while he completes the painting of Zamikow (despite the fact that in *Michael* the movement toward and away is

divided in the edit by a shot of Zamikow). In both cases Dreyer's camera marks the moment of shared artistic creation, whether painting or lieder, setting it apart stylistically from the shots around it through its complexity and unorthodox symmetry. As in *Michael*, so in *Gertrud* the lovers' emotional bond is established and expressed through an aesthetic act within the narrative, itself overtly aestheticised through the filmmaking strategies employed. Paradoxically, the distinctive camera work used to represent the characters' strength of feeling mutes the dramatic impact of the scenes by rendering them aesthetic objects to be appreciated by the viewer for their formal beauty.

But why, we may ask, does art inspire such strong feelings between characters? Two contradictory answers present themselves. On the one hand, art in these films (even if it may seem kitsch to viewers, and may have been to Dreyer himself)[2] embodies quixotic notions about the ideal, the eternal, the ever-present. Such sentiments fit well with characters' romantic conception of love and are reflected in the style of art: academic painting and Hellenistic sculpture depicting mythical figures; romantic music, nocturnes and lieder. The Countess says to Michael on her first visit to his lodgings where *The Victor*, a recent gift from Zoret, hangs in a prominent position in the background, 'I long to believe there is something like an eternity.' On the other hand, the commodification of art and its value as an index of social and financial worth is never far from our awareness, nor that of the characters. Zoret's paintings are bought and sold throughout *Michael*.[3] Indeed, the conflict between the lovers is metonymically represented in Michael's selling and Zoret's buying back for him his most famous and valuable painting *The Victor*. If Zoret imagined he was capturing Michael's heart forever by immortalising him in art, then Michael's gesture is a reminder of the economic relationship that parallels their romantic relationship. Zoret treats Michael paternalistically, as an inferior, yet the film insists that without Michael as his muse Zoret would not have achieved such artistic and financial success. The Duke of Monthieu says to

Michael, 'You owe him a lot, Michael. But the Master owes you a lot too.' The Countess, currently in financial straits, requests a portrait by Zoret precisely because of its cultural value, which she hopes will increase her own value. Zoret agrees to paint her because he may believe he has found another muse. Artists require money to practice their art, and art makes money. In *Gertrud*, Erland throws over Gertrud for the woman whom, he claims, is helping him in his career.

Inspired by, creating and owning art, the protagonists come to believe that their lovers should have similar ideal qualities, but also that, as with art, they should be able to possess them. Gertrud and Erland appear to agree on this point. In splitting up with Gertrud, Erland says to her: 'I dream of an ideal woman, but you are not that woman. She must be chaste and obey me and be my property. You are too proud. ... It's your soul which is proud.' Gertrud says to her former lover Gabriel, 'It was your work that separated us. And honour, fame, money, everything that shone.' In leaving her husband, she declares: 'A woman loves her husband above all else, but work comes first for him. ... The man I am to be with must be mine entirely.' Although the nature of the desired possession may differ, ultimately the films suggest that the economic structure of capitalism and the emotional realities of romantic love are incompatible. Only once Zoret has bequeathed everything to the prodigal Michael does he express a sudden realisation which also forms the epigraph of the film: 'Now I can die in peace, for I have seen a great love.'[4] Divesting himself of his possessions, including the paintings through which he captured and attempted to control Michael, appears to awaken him to a new awareness. Perhaps he has ceased to regard Michael as his model, his work of art, his property.

Reinforcing the conceptual link between art objects and lovers, the *mise-en-scène* of the films serves to compare the two. Not only is Michael pictorially and narratively likened to the paintings of him, but other characters are associated with sculptures and paintings

featuring different models and subjects. Paradoxically, the work of art can become the embodiment of the person. In the subplot of *Michael,* the Duke of Monthieu and Alice Adelsskjold embark on an adulterous affair despite the ever-presence of Alice's solicitous husband. At Zoret's dinner party the lovers communicate their mutual passion wordlessly through a sculpture, the naked torso of a woman, which becomes a simulacrum of Alice (fig. 2). The Duke caresses the sculpture as though it were Alice herself, while Alice nearly swoons in response.

In *Gertrud* the linking of art object and character serves a less material but more metaphorical and obviously reflexive function. During her first tryst with Erland in the park, a statue of Aphrodite plays a key role in the *mise-en-scène*. From a medium two-shot of the lovers, the camera dollies back in a subtle arc-and-pan motion to reveal the statue of Aphrodite. The only apparent reason for the camera movement is to accommodate the statue in the frame; indeed, the dolly works contrary to the mounting tension of the scene, taking us further from the actors. Balancing the composition in the left middle-ground, the statue forms a vital part of the scene, transforming the two-shot into a three-shot which is then held for over a minute (fig. 3). Unlike in the examples from *Michael*, the characters do not appear to notice the sculpture; it is only there for the film's audience to reflect upon and clearly invites a comparison with Gertrud at the very moment when she is deciding to consummate her relationship with Erland. At the end of the scene the camera, dollying with the pair as they leave the park, holds on the statue letting the characters clear the frame, and reminding the viewer of its presence and signifying function: it personifies and universalises Gertrud's love and sexuality; it bestows upon her time-bound action, represented by film as movement, something of the stillness and timelessness of the plastic arts.

As in these scenes, so throughout *Michael* and *Gertrud* art is everywhere present in the *mise-en-scène* forming the bond and backdrop of the protagonists' relationships, and also

commenting on their situations. It has often been remarked in Dreyer criticism that the works of art, as well as other elements in the film including character dialogue, tend to interpret events for the viewer, leaving the viewer cognitively adrift in the face of what may seem to be an interpretive vacuum. This is particularly evident in *Gertrud*. Compounded by the slow pace, the monotonous and rhythmic delivery of lines, and the long takes, the film generates an 'emptiness' which David Bordwell describes as 'excessive' in that the style 'reduces meaning but prolongs perception. ... This prolonging of perception creates a drainage of meaning. Either the narrative is saying nothing or it is saying nothing *new*' (1981: 186-7, emphasis in the original). Addressing the use that Dreyer makes of art within the *mise-en-scène* James Schamus, in his recent monograph on *Gertrud*, describes the film as 'rhetorically mirror[ing] itself, as its characters also pause to read the enframed narratives that make up their story' (2008: 43). A good example of this – Schamus' primary example – occurs during the banquet sequence of *Gertrud* which draws on narrative information supplied earlier, in the park scene discussed above.

During their encounter in the park Gertrud tells Erland of a dream she had the previous night in which she ran naked through the streets pursued by hounds, awaking when they caught her. The next night, Gertrud meets her old friend Axel at the banquet and sits with him in the lounge. Just as Axel finishes describing his recent work on dreams and psychic phenomena, Gertrud notices the tapestry hanging on the wall behind them. Once again the camera reframes to feature the work of art, dollying back from the characters (fig. 4). The tapestry depicts the essence of Gertrud's dream. Like the statue of Aphrodite, it mirrors narrative information, figuratively suggesting what the protagonist is currently experiencing or about to undergo. The scene in the lounge occurs moments before Gertrud discovers that Erland has made their affair public, bragging to his friends at a party about his conquest, and that he is not the person she thought him to be. Although she does not yet

realise it herself, her interpretation of the dream as she expresses it to Erland – that the *two* of them are 'quite alone in the world' – is incorrect. In fact, as the tapestry and her description of the dream both make clear, *she* is quite alone in the world. Erland is one of the hounds.

For viewers, and often also for the characters, the works of art foreshadow events, provide a commentary on the characters' moment-to-moment actions, and act as tokens of the past, triggers for memory. All three of these functions, operating on the characters' past, present and future, create a strong sense of predetermination. It is as though the characters' fates are mapped out and recorded by the art that surrounds them. Indeed, determinism is a diegetic issue in both films and a topic of conversation. Prior to Gertrud's noticing the tapestry, Axel mentions that he is writing a book on free will. Gertrud replies, 'My father was a mournful fatalist. He taught us that everything in life was predestined. ... "Destiny controls everything."' She, on the other hand, believes in free will: 'I prefer to choose my husbands myself.' Yet as we have seen the *mise-en-scène* appears to contradict her. Indeed, Gertrud herself occasionally speaks deterministically about making choices. Before consummating her relationship with Erland she says to him, 'When I saw you at the concert I had to love you. ... Yes, it's my sorrow to have to love you as I do.' To Gabriel's mourning the loss of Gertrud, Gertrud replies in a tragic vein, 'No, one must choose. And one always realises that one has lost the only thing worthwhile.' Similarly in *Michael* a strong sense of tragic inevitability is generated in the opening sequence when Zoret, presenting his dinner guests with a *memento mori*, an image of a skull on a trivet, initiates a discussion about death. What emerges is a prefiguring of the entire plot. With death on his mind, Zoret concludes the conversation by announcing that he has decided to paint the moment when Caesar is murdered by his adopted son Brutus. When Michael asks Zoret who the model will be for Brutus, Zoret simply fixes him with a portentous stare. When Michael does eventually betray him, the Master takes to his bed and dies.

It is as if the characters are being doubled, shadowed by fictional figures that mythologise, but also seem to determine, their actions. At times, however, this mirroring is so foregrounded as to be overdetermined. In *Michael* Zoret, devastated by his loss of his muse, transfigures his suffering into art. He paints a canvas of a Job-like figure entitled *The Vanquished* enframing an obvious narrative in relation to his painting of Michael, *The Victor*. At a ceremony in honour of him and his latest painting, the film's style underscores the connection between Zoret and the figure in the painting. In a two-shot featuring the painter and his representation in the painting, the camera racks focus from Zoret to the painting behind him. Accompanying this shift of focus the light on Zoret is gradually flagged off, throwing him into dark shadow (fig. 5). Lighting effects unmotivated by the diegesis occur throughout Dreyer's oeuvre, but here arguably add a disconcerting level of artifice in the service of conveying what the viewer has already long-since divined: that the Job figure is a representation of Zoret. Zoret may have painted the figure with the intention of likening himself to Job, but by framing the Master in his own frame the film emphasises determinism over self-determination. However, given the level of stylistic excess we may be inclined to wonder whether the interpretive function is primary.

As noted above, Dreyer's stylistic excess produces a strong distancing effect. In *Michael*, 90-degree cuts on action, mismatched eyelines, and enormous changes of shot size, from extreme long shot to medium close-up, repeatedly within the same scene, keep us aware of the artifice of the spectacle before us. Close-ups of faces leap out of the darkness, and also out of the context carefully established in the preceding long shot. Thus, on the one hand the films' style reinforces the air of artifice already engendered by the numerous works of art in the mise-en-scène. On the other hand, it undermines the capacity of this art to support the narrative in establishing an air of tragedy. This may explain why the tragedies fail to come off as some viewers might expect – or hope! Instead of identifying with the characters in their

suffering, we are continually reminded that they remain fixtures in a work of art. But if this is the conclusion to which our interpretive endeavour leads us, we find that the films have got there first: within the diegesis the characters have already been made, and made themselves, into works of art.

If *Michael* and *Gertrud* remain unsatisfying films dramatically, it may be that Dreyer is aiming to direct our attention elsewhere, away from strictly narrative or stylistic elements, or even the reciprocal relationship of these elements, and toward the friction created between them. Often pictorial and (in *Gertrud*) aural elements seem to pull away from the narrative, creating a fissure, a tear in the fabric of the work that makes one aware of the image and sound running alongside but separate from the story. This stylistic strategy highlights, at the expense of the action, the diegetic space, the fall of light and shadow, the separation of a particular moment from the moments on either side. It is as though the action stills and the moving pictures stop to become a painting, or a *tableau vivant* in Brigitte Peucker's sense of the term:

> Tableau vivant moments in film set up a tension between the two- and three-dimensional, between stasis and movement, between the 'death' of the human body in painting and its 'life' in cinema. Further, because tableau vivant exists at the nodal point that joins painting, sculpture, and theatre, its evocation in film is a moment of intensified intermediality.
>
> (Peucker 2008: 26)

This intermediality creates a sense of layering, collage, or palimpsest that emphasises the hybrid nature of the film medium and the objecthood of the people and things represented which the filmic image 'can only metaphorically suggest' (Peucker 2008: 26). As opposed to

'proto-cinematic paintings' such as those of the Northern European realist tradition as identified by Anne Hollander in *Moving Pictures* (1989: 29) which aspire to a state of imminence, revelation, ambiguity and fluidity, as though they were almost already moving pictures, it seems as though Dreyer aspired to imbue moving pictures with pictorial qualities which are the obverse of the proto-cinematic but can be found in the same painting tradition: a sense of suspension and attentive detachment. Elements of cinematic form such as lighting, framing, acting, camera movement and pacing, thus combine with the diegetic works of art to produce *tableau vivant* moments which suspend the characters between subjecthood and objecthood, life and death, cinema and painting.

Dreyer had a lifelong interest in painting and cited in interviews the influence on his work of James Abbott McNeil Whistler and the Danish painter, Vilhelm Hammershøi.[5] In his book-length study, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer*, David Bordwell notes the influence of these and other painters on the visual style of various films by Dreyer, and discusses the significant and abiding impact of Hammershøi (1981: 42, 172). Dreyer's predilection for the tableau style, for a focus on domestic interiors that in their design and framing tend to subordinate the characters to line and shape, as well as for a style of soft, oblique lighting that reminds us at times of Vermeer and the Northern European chamber art tradition, led him to de-dramatise his stories through an insistent focus on settings. The characters and their dramas are often subordinated to space and to the art contained within it, and the films can therefore seem to form a single picture, rather than a series of moving images. This effect is intensified by the *kammerspiel* aesthetic of these films in which the action is confined almost entirely to interiors. The sense of a continuous space existing beyond the frame or beyond the walls of the rooms in which the scenes play out is problematised by Dreyer's omission of exterior establishing shots and the transitional shots that most filmmakers use to link one interior space to another. Cutting directly from an interior scene in one location to an interior

scene in another leads to a sense of disorientation, as these different spaces are made to appear isolated, disconnected – almost as if they were indeed separate paintings, with the connective movement that cinema conventionally provides suspended.

In the final moments of *Gertrud* the characters are first subordinated to, then eliminated from, the space that surrounds them, leaving in the final frame – the last shot of Dreyer's career – a chair, a door, an empty space (figs. 6 and 7). We feel the narrative, which has always struggled to emerge from under the weight of the spaces in which it plays out, slowly wind down, as if from the force of entropy, leaving in its place emptiness, stasis. The similarity of many of Dreyer's settings and compositions to those of the paintings of Hammershøi is striking. These final shots, in their simplicity, their spareness, their focus on doors and rooms, recall in particular the painting *Interior* (also called *The Four Rooms*) painted in 1914, one of the last Hammershøi completed (fig. 8). A description of the style of Hammershøi's paintings is illuminating in relation to Dreyer's films. In a review of the Royal Academy's 2008 exhibition of Hammershøi's work, British painter and writer Julian Bell wrote:

> Art suspends. But that is condition worth submitting to. ... I note one of his favourite manoeuvres. To make as if to smother an underpainting that's bright and warm with chilling, heavy overlays, above all of grey; but to hold back the brush so that the life keeps peeping through.
>
> (Bell 2008)

This provides an apt metaphorical description of Dreyer's stylistic project, his 'excess' smothering the characters and distancing the viewer, yet still tantalising with the spark of passionate lives.

With their overt artifice, their disjunctiveness, their portraits of characters captured at times in a state of suspended animation, characters who suffer and who cannot be helped nor fully empathised with, *Michael* and *Gertrud* present problematic viewing. We may feel, along with the protagonists themselves, a sense of suffocation – the denial of catharsis. The protagonists however, like Deleuze's seers, 'cut off from an over-rigid, over-burdensome, or over-superficial external world' (Deleuze 1989: 171), nevertheless find the strength to affirm their faith in this world. Despite the weight of determining social and economic forces, and the tragic realisation that, as Gertrud puts it, 'love is suffering, love is unhappiness' and that one must always lose 'the only thing worthwhile',[6] both make a choice that 'no longer concerns a particular term, but the mode of existence of the one who chooses' (Deleuze 1989: 171). This creative act is to put their faith in love and in life. On his deathbed Zoret exonerates Michael; Gertrud carries on a long-term platonic relationship with Axel and declares near the end of her life, 'love is all'. Artists and idealists, they not only function as characters in a drama, they personify the transformative power of art.

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[1] Drum and Drum have a very low opinion of *Michael*, finding it 'bereft of the nobility and idealism that characterize virtually all of Dreyer's serious films. ... It is difficult to know why Dreyer chose to film *Mikaël* in the first place, since it is so unlike him' (2000: 105, 107). Dreyer, however, who was proud of the film, finds similarities between *Michael* and *Gertrud*, and also between their authors: 'The author of the novel [*Mikaël*], Herman Bang, belonged to the same period as Hjalmar Söderberg, the author of *Gertrud*, and it was even said of Söderberg that he imitated Bang, although it was Bang who imitated Söderberg. Well, it turns out that they knew each other and were even very friendly' (quoted in Nash 1977: 49).

[2] Commenting upon the décor in *Michael*, Dreyer remarks that the film's atmosphere reflects the 'rich taste' of the period 'which was in bad taste but which, obviously was considered excellent at that time' (quoted in Nash 1977: 49).

[3] One of cinema's renowned cameramen, Karl Freund, who photographed most of *Michael*, plays a bit part as the art dealer LeBlanc; casting the director of photography as a purveyor of images, a choice made by Dreyer himself, appears to be yet another extradiegetic comment on the story.

[4] Which love Zoret refers to remains ambiguous. It could be the love of Zamikow and Michael, or Zoret's own love for Michael.

[5] Among these interviews is one recorded in New York in 1965 and included in Eureka's Masters of Cinema series DVD release (2004) of *Michael*.

[6] In these films, 'the only thing worthwhile' is love. Both protagonists remark on how lonely they are. Gertrud admits to Gabriel, 'My life has been so appallingly lonely and empty.' Zoret confides in the journalist Switt, 'No one knows how lonely I am.'

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